INTRODUCTION

The Department of Conflict Resolution, Human Security, and Global Governance and its Center for Peace, Democracy, and Development at the University of Massachusetts Boston wish to honor the remarkable century of life and career of Benjamin Slomoff ’97 with a major research and policy symposium on Bridging Global Religious Divides.

The symposium will bring together leading practitioners and scholars engaged in interfaith conflict resolution in local, national, and global contexts so as to analyze best practices and develop an ongoing research and action agenda that promotes innovative policies, new tools in conflict resolution, and scholarly work on inter- and intra-religious peace building.

Religion has quickly proven itself the defining conflict issue of the Twenty-First Century. Religion and conflict are frequently linked in popular discourse, yet from the beginning, religions have typically held peacemaking as a central value and obligation to their members. This ancient tension between religion as a vehicle of peace and religion as a source of division has taken on global dimensions in recent decades, particularly across a belt of countries roughly crossed by the 10th parallel, where Islam and Christianity meet, but in many other parts of the world as well, including Boston. Increasingly, conflict resolution activities must better understand how to engage religion in a manner that enhances its peacemaking capacities while undermining frictions that may arise across religious divides or among its own members.

Religious ethics and approaches to peacemaking deeply influenced conflict resolution and peacemaking methodologies as they developed over the last 50 years into a discipline present in academic departments, NGOs, and government agencies worldwide. Moreover, in the last decade conflict resolution practitioners and scholars have begun to work closely with religious actors to incorporate the discipline’s best practices and improve the peacemaking capacity of religious institutions. The result has been the development of innovative mixed methodologies and hybrid models enriching both religious peace practice and the conflict resolution field, the full impacts of which we are just beginning to appreciate and analyze.

GOAL

In this two-day symposium, practitioners, policy makers, and academics will come together to discuss and analyze their experiences in initiatives that attempt to bridge religious divides, with the goal of defining new research questions and field practices in inter- and intra-religious peace building.
OBJECTIVES

Through three keynote sessions and several moderated panels, participants will be invited to examine the field, analyze current practices, define new methods, and develop an agenda for practice and research in interreligious conflict resolution.

Keynotes and panel discussions will draw from the experiences of field practitioners and examine initiatives that:

- Assist efforts to bridge the religious divides in “Tenth Parallel” countries like Nigeria, Sudan, Somalia, and Indonesia;
- Support dialogue in American cities between US law enforcement and Muslim and Sikh community leaders over tensions with the government on a range of community concerns;
- Help divided societies like Israelis and Palestinians to develop new models for peaceful coexistence;
- Engage members of immigrant communities in conversations designed to address religious and ethnic divisions;
- Craft US foreign policy in a manner that reaches out to Muslim communities and supports peacemaking across religious lines.

We will then analyze the effects of such programs and policy initiatives, looking at their specific impacts and defining broader and transferrable lessons in order to discover:

- Innovative methodologies that better span religious differences;
- Hybrid models that incorporate both religious peace practice and mainstream conflict resolution approaches;
- Strategies that help local peace and conflict resolution projects scale up their impacts to the national or conflict-wide level.

We will invite practitioners, policy makers, and academics engaged in initiatives bridging religious divides in order to discuss their experiences and to provide direction for:

1) Innovative research that can help extend learning in the field and build on successes already achieved;
2) Future development of programs in these areas overall;
3) A comprehensive UMass Boston research initiative on religion and conflict that will take the learning from the symposium and broaden the scope of UMass Boston’s current projects and academic inquiry to a higher level of learning and application to religious conflicts elsewhere; and
4) Other scholars and practitioners who will be invited to join the symposium and
gain learning relevant to their work as well, and who may wish to join UMass Boston in such a research initiative.

**STRATEGIES**

Each session of the symposium, and each of the keynote speakers, will be tasked with a specific question relevant to the theme of the symposium in order to address the goal and objectives. Keynote speakers will be invited to launch their remarks in **policy briefings** to be released before the symposium in anticipation of the event.

In addition, we will invite an outside scholar to attend all of the panels to track overarching themes, which she/he will report at the end of the symposium along with Professor Darren Kew, who will also comment on such themes. Together, and in collaboration with an external taskforce, they will begin to develop a report on next steps for research initiatives on religion and conflict.

**PARTICIPANTS**

Members of the academic, policy, and non-governmental organization communities will be invited to participate as attendees and informal contributors to the Symposium. Those who practice conflict resolution among diverse religious communities, academics who study global and comparative religion, anthropologists, sociologists, ethnographers, security experts, and others whose work and passions intersect with religion and international affairs will be actively recruited to attend the symposium.

Three keynote addresses will provide cornerstone elements of the symposium’s agenda:

1. **Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Jerry White** of the Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations (CSO), the US State Department’s central vehicle for conflict analysis and conflict resolution policy development, will be asked to provide CSO’s vision for managing religious conflicts. [Confirmed.]

2. **Eliza Griswold**, author of *The Tenth Parallel*, will look at building understanding across the great divide between Islam and Christianity. She has looked at the relationships among the people of these two great religions in Nigeria, Indonesia, Sudan, Somali, and other nations along the Tenth Parallel, which has often been a fault line of conflict. [Confirmed.]

3. **Farah Pandith**, the Former State Department’s Special Representative to Muslim Communities, will speak on gender and religion, particularly in terms of the changing role of women in Islam. She will also be asked to speak to the problem of scaling up local initiatives: How can grassroots efforts be better crafted to impact the national-level dynamics of the conflict? [Confirmed.]
Panels will be reflective of the preceding keynote addresses and present the experience of multiple practitioners and scholars in inter-religious peacebuilding in a variety of contexts. Each panel session will feature a knowledgeable moderator who will be tasked with pushing panelists to challenge and test ideas. These conversations will go beyond a summary of writings to give truly critical treatment of religion and conflict that points toward synthesis of the learning from the panels and better forms of practice in the field.

Symposium participants will also be engaged in innovative participation methods, inspired by approaches like Open Space Technology, that will allow them greater opportunities to contribute to the discussion. Panels will also be webcast with a wider audience invited to comment in real time on Facebook and Twitter.